

**Opening Statement
Chairman Tom Davis
Committee on Government Reform
“Open for Business: Ensuring Employee and Customer Safety at
the Former Brentwood Postal Facility”
October 23, 2003**

We are here today to discuss the cleanup and reopening of the United States Postal Service’s Joseph Curseen, Jr. and Thomas Morris, Jr. Processing and Distribution Center on Brentwood Road in Washington, DC.

We all remember the terrible events of October 2001, when the dedicated postal employees of the Brentwood processing center joined the front lines of the war on terrorism. Tragically, two workers, Joseph Curseen and Thomas Morris lost their lives to anthrax, which passed through the building in letters addressed to Senators Daschle and Leahy. Two others were infected, and the building has remained closed to this day.

In July 2001, the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia held a hearing on the Postal Service’s plans to clean and reopen the facility, an effort that was just beginning. Now, with the cleanup complete, and reopening scheduled for next month, we are following up on that hearing.

The Postal Service, in consultation with scientists and experts from various federal and local agencies, conducted the largest anthrax decontamination using chlorine dioxide in our nation’s history. This hearing will examine the conduct of the cleanup, the manner by which the Postal Service determined that the building is safe to reoccupy, and how well the Postal Service communicated with its workers.

Let me emphasize that last point. Over the next few months, the Postal Service will be asking its employees to reenter a building where two of their colleagues were killed by an invisible, airborne germ. It goes without saying that they are afraid. A partial cure for their fears is complete, open communication about the cleanup, and about their options.

Yesterday, we learned that a suspicious package found in the Greenville, South Carolina Air Mail Facility was confirmed to contain ricin, a deadly plant toxin. Although it appears that no ricin escaped the package, the

facility was shut down for environmental testing last night. This is a developing situation, so I don't expect to hear the full story at this hearing. But how the Postal Service handles the situation in Greenville will certainly show how well they have learned the lessons of Brentwood. I am also certain that news of the Greenville incident will weigh heavily on the minds of postal employees around the country in the coming days and weeks, so we need to be certain that appropriate time and resources are aimed at answering whatever concerns or questions they may have.

We have two panels of witnesses today. On the first panel are Bernard Unger from the General Accounting Office, who has been examining the Postal Service's communication with its employees; Thomas Day, Postal Service Vice President of Engineering and Jerry Lane, Manager of Capitol Metro Operations, both of whom have been intimately involved in every aspect of the cleanup and reopening; and Davis Layne from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Theodore Gordon of the District of Columbia Department of Health. OSHA and the DC Department of Health helped plan the cleanup and participated in the Environmental Clearance Committee, which reviewed the cleanup.

On the Second panel, we have Dick Collins of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, and Mike Reid of the American Postal Workers Union. Together they represent most of the craft employees who will be returning to the facility. I want to thank everyone for coming, especially in light of the schedule change.